GANDHI SMARAK NIDHI

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

As is well known, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (GSN) was established by the Indian National Congress after the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. To start with, the ad hoc committee constituted as per the decision taken on 6th February 1948 included great national leaders — Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and Shri Jagjivan Ram amongst many others. On 13th February 1948, an appeal was issued by Dr. Rajendra Prasad to the people to donate liberally to the GSN. The Congress Working Committee approved these decisions and measures in its meeting held on 21-22 February 1948. Finally, on 17th December 1948 the GSN was constituted as a public charitable Trust having a 24-member Board of Trustees including the above national leaders along with other equally eminent national leaders. It was subsequently registered in Delhi vide No 5394 dated 14.09.1993. GSN is located in modest buildings constructed on a piece of 6.199 acres of land provided by the Government of India, free of cost, on long term (99 years) perpetual lease at Rajghat, New Delhi -110002.

Main Objects

The main purpose of the Trust was "to further the manifold constructive activities in which Gandhiji was interested and

such other activities of a like nature which give concrete shape to his ideas. The Trust funds were also to be used for collecting, preserving and propagating his teachings and to maintain a museum where articles connected with his life and work would be preserved."

Activities

Accordingly, GSN has so far undertaken a variety of vital activities throughout the country to fulfil these objects as briefly discussed below:

Gandhian Institutions Promoted and/or Assisted:

It has promoted and/or assisted about 31 autonomous Gandhian institutions across the country. They include:

- Its state units;
- Institutions promoted for specific purposes, such as the National Gandhi Memorial Museum and three state-level Gandhi Memorial Museums, Gandhi Peace Foundation, Himalaya Seva Sangh, Gandhi Bhavan in Delhi University and Gandhian Study Centres, one each in Jaipur University (Rajasthan) and M.G. University, Kottayam (Kerala), and the like; and
- Several other Gandhian institutions assisted by it.

It is, however, pertinent to underline that GSN, by promoting the first Gandhi Bhavan in Delhi University, has been able to catalyse the establishment and growth of about two dozen more Gandhi Bhavans in as many universities across the country.

Apart from the financial and ideological assistance received from GSN, some of these institutions have been raising their

own resources to carry on their specific activities. Besides, their multi-level networking by GSN has been promoting a relationship of friendship, cooperation and interaction among them.

Gram Seva Kendras (GSKs)

Rural Reconstruction Centres: Pursuant to Gandhi-ji's dream, GSN through its state units has established thousands of GSKs in underdeveloped and remote areas of the country including also the tribal areas to promote participatory integrated rural reconstruction through activities such as Khadi and village industries, Go-seva, education, health and sanitation, eradication of untouchability and promotion of communal harmony, and voters' education to strengthen democracy.

Tattva Prachar Kendras (TPKs)

Centres to propagate the quintessence of Gandhian thought: TPKs have been organizing seminars, camps and trainings on Gandhian thought in universities, colleges, schools and other locations. Most of these centres have since been taken over by Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF).

Truth, Non-violence, Peace Research and Action

GPF, promoted and assisted by GSN, has been working specifically to promote truth and non-violence among individuals, families and communities as well as in national and international affairs, besides peace research and action including direct interventions to resolve conflicts and restore peace in conflict and violence ridden areas. Shanti Sena (Peace Corps) and Mahila Shanti Sena (Women's

Peace Corps) are also among the mechanisms used for the purpose.

Communal Harmony

Communal harmony has all along been a major item on the agenda of GSN's constituent/sister institutions with outstanding track record and notable contribution to their credit. It is pertinent to mention that GSN's present Chairman, Shri R.N. Upadhyay has received National Communal Harmony Award 2007 of the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs for his exemplary work in the North-Eastern India,

Vital Role of Museums

National Gandhi Memorial Museum (NGMM) and State Museums at Madurai (TN), Patna (Bihar), and Barrackpore (WB), promoted and assisted by GSN, have been playing an extremely vital role as regards providing information, education and inspiration on Gandhiji's life, thought and action and keeping his memory alive through valuable exhibits, benefiting visitors from all over India and world at large, especially the younger generation comprising youth and students of universities, colleges and schools. Besides, the NGMM has a rich library on Gandhiana and some other state museums have equally good, even if smaller, libraries.

Gandhian Studies

GSN has also promoted Gandhian studies in universities through Gandhi Bhavans and Gandhi Study Centres, by contributing to the establishment of Gandhian Institute

of Studies at Varanasi, and by organizing short courses and examinations for students and youth on Gandhiji's life, thought and work.

Knowledge Dissemination

Book stalls, libraries and over two dozen journals and periodicals of GSN and its constituent/sister institutions have been disseminating valuable literature, knowledge and information on Gandhiji's life, thought and work in various languages locally, nationally and internationally. GSN's bulletins, Sansthakul in Hindi and English and GPF's journals Gandhi Marg in Hindi and English deserve special mention.

Seminars, Conferences, Workshops, Camps and Meetings

Besides, GSN and its constituent/sister institutions have been regularly organizing well designed events as mentioned above to promote and facilitate interaction and experience sharing on relevant vital themes related with Gandhiji's life, thought and work. Reports of these events also contribute to dissemination of useful knowledge and information on Gandhiji.

Health Care

Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Foundation, Wardha, promoted and assisted by GSN, has been doing exemplary work on eradication of leprosy and treatment and rehabilitation of lepers.

Similarly, Gandhi Smarak Prakritic Chikitsa Samiti has been promoting nature cure and networking institutions engaged in it throughout the country.

Not the least, Kasturba Health Society, promoted by GSN, apart from promoting rural health care, has been running Mahatma Gandhi Medical College at Sevagram with the assistance of the Government of India.

Historic Monuments

Apart from promoting Gandhi Museums, GSN has played a vital role in maintenance and upkeep of historic monuments related with Gandhiji such as Sevagram Ashram and Magan Sangrahalaya (Wardha), Aga Khan Palace (Pune) and Mani Bhavan (Mumbai). GSN used to take care of and manage Gandhi Samadhi as well until it was taken over by the GOI some time ago.

Special Events

GSN has been playing a vital role in celebration of special events such as Gandhi Centenary Year, visits of Martin Luther King Jr. and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, International Day of Non-violence, and Centenary of Satyagraha, besides other special events related with Gandhiji.

Disaster Management

GSN and its constituent/sister institutions have been actively participating in the management of disasters, man-made as well as natural, and relief and rehabilitation related therewith. Besides, in 1962 during Chinese aggression they played a vital role in boosting the morale of people in the border areas from J&K to Arunachal Pradesh (then NEFA) by establishing a chain Shanti Kendras (Peace Centres). A good number of Peace workers stayed and worked relentlessly in the border areas

focusing on education, health care and raising awareness for social well being and national integration until 1974.

Other Constructive Activities

Furthermore, GSN has been providing ideological and financial assistance to Harijan Sevak Sangh, All India Prohibition Council and Nai Talim Samiti to promote their respective constructive activities.

Networking

As already mentioned earlier, multi-level multi-pronged networking of the constituent/sister institutions by GSN has been promoting and facilitating a relationship and process of friendship, cooperation and interaction among them to their mutual advantage as well as to that of the cause they seek to serve.

However, looking back on the process over the last six decades since 1948, it may be noted that the gradual passing away of the galaxy of great Gandhian leaders in voluntary action and constructive work coupled with acute resource crunch and greatly increased operational cost has affected most of these activities adversely, although the tremendous strength and eternal relevance of Gandhiji and his ideas and activities has kept them going.

Way Forward

Nevertheless, GSN would move forward in furtherance of its objects in larger national interest as follows:

Establishment of eleven new units in new and/or uncovered states, viz. Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand,

Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Sikkim, prioritizing the violence ridden-ones, over a reasonable period of time.

- Activation and strengthening of the existing constituent/ sister institutions to enable them to be adequately effective in propagating Gandhiji's ideas and activities, sustaining his memory, pursuing their respective activities, intervening to resolve conflicts and restore peace, and involving ever increasing number of like-minded people, especially youth, women, minorities and other disadvantaged sections of the society.
- Celebration of coming special events.
- Facing emerging challenges.
- Strengthening the multi-level multi-pronged networking.

Indeed, it will require optimum harnessing of spiritual, moral and material resources to succeed in this endeavour as envisaged.

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